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## IS SOCIALISM ADVANCING IN ENGLAND?

BY THE REV. PROF W. G. BLAIKIE, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

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SOCIALISM may still perhaps be identified in the minds of some with anarchy, atheism, dynamite and assassination; but its reasonable and intelligent friends among us have stripped it of these and other ugly adjuncts. It is not now held to be the product of either dreaming lunatics on the one hand, or reckless desperadoes on the other; it is allowed by friends and foes alike to have a reasonable basis, and to be capable of a friendly alliance with religion, family order and morality. It has ceased to be regarded as the culmination of democratic violence, bent on seizing all existing property, flinging it into a common reservoir, and doling it out to all and sundry in equal dividends; it is no longer the synonym of anarchy or of communism. It is on this account that it is receiving much more attention than in former days and, according to its advocates, constant recruits.

The distinctive term by which it now desires to be known is "collectivism," and the essence, or as Dr. Schäffle puts it, the quintessence of collectivism may be simply stated. Its object is to transfer the whole *means of production*—all that goes to *produce* the commodities needful for human beings, namely, land, machinery, workshops, warehouses, ships, railways, and all capital used in production—from the ownership of individuals to the ownership of the State. Its purpose is illustrated by the transaction which took place a few years ago when the ownership of all our British telegraphs was transferred from railway companies or other owners to the State. The transference, however, of the whole instruments of production would be of no avail unless followed up by a corporate organization of labor and a distribution of the proceeds in proportion to the value of the work done by each laborer. On these three things—nationalization of the instru-

ments of production, unification of labor, and proportionate distribution of the fruits—the fabric of socialism rests, as it is usually presented by its more intelligent advocates in this closing decade of the nineteenth century. Nothing is allowed to be socialism, or at least collectivism, that does not embrace these points.

In this way modern English Socialism severs connection not only with revolution and anarchy, but also with certain elaborate systems, such as Fourier's "Phalansteries," or even Comte's "polity," by means of which society was to be constituted on an entirely new basis. It also differentiates itself from not a few movements to which the general name of Socialism, or social reform, is often given. The "Christian Socialism" of Kingsley, Maurice, and others, some forty years ago, does not come under the true category of Socialism, because it did not recognise these three points. Even the "Christian Social Union" of the present day is not in its constitution socialistic, although some of its members may have embraced the tenets of collectivism. Dr. Westcott, Bishop of Durham, in his "Social Aspects of Christianity," shows warm sympathy with socialist objects, with the elevation and increased comfort of the working classes, but he does not believe in socialistic weapons. "Lombard Street in Lent," the somewhat enigmatical title of a series of addresses by members of the Christian Social Union, strives to correct many of the blemishes in the present economy of labor, but does not advocate the distinctive principles of collectivism. It may be a question whether the members of this Union are not as well entitled to the name of socialists as the advocates of the three points; and it is only as a matter of convenience that in this paper we restrict its application to those who claim, as a *sine quâ non*, the nationalization of the whole instruments of production.

Unfortunately it is impossible to deny that under the present system many serious social evils are found. Nothing can be more uncomfortable than the disputes between capital and labor; nothing more tragical than the strikes and lock-outs to which they often lead. And as to the condition of the lowest class of our people in London and other large towns, it is simply heart-breaking. It is a disgrace to civilization. All these evils collectivists ascribe, without hesitation, to the system that has hitherto ruled in the world of labor, the system of "individual-

ism," and the ruinous competition which it involves. Their view is, that under the present system, labor is exploited for the sole benefit of the capitalist ; it is his aim to produce as cheaply as possible ; in order to do this the workman is robbed of his fair share of profit and the capitalist fattens on the spoil. The tendency of the system is to make the poor poorer and the rich richer. Small industries are swallowed up by large ; all independent ways of making a livelihood are cut off from the worker ; he must depend on the capitalist for the very right to live. It is a system that affords no prospect of improvement ; the process of the fat kine swallowing up the lean (for Pharaoh's dream is reversed) must go on as long as there are lean kine to be swallowed, and at the completion of the process, what you will have will be, a few men rich "beyond the dreams of avarice," and the great mass "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

There is some truth, and also some exaggeration here. As a whole, it is not true that the skilled artisan class has become poorer of late years ; on the contrary that class is much better off. Any statistical statement of wages and prices makes this plain. And as for the unskilled and unemployed mass, whose conditions of life are so miserable, it should be remembered that it is characteristic of the large towns where they live, that the feeble of the race are not absorbed or borne up by the rest, but sink to the bottom. Moreover, whether it be cause or effect, it is to be noted that much of the helplessness of this class and much of their misery are due to drink. Any explanation of the misery of the east end of London and all our large towns that overlooks the influence of drink, is on the very face of it miserably and palpably defective.

Still, our modern industrial system has much to answer for. The history of our manufactures is not flattering to human nature. In the early part of the century, when the practice began of employing large numbers of men, women and children in single manufactories or other industries, the abuses that arose were frightful. It is shocking to read of children toiling for fourteen or fifteen hours a day, and only kept awake by the lash of the foreman ; of women, even in a state of pregnancy, carrying heavy loads in pits, or working deep in water, or of children on all fours with a chain round their waist dragging trucks of coal along dark and dirty passages ; of injured spines and twisted

limbs, of wounds and bruises, premature old age and early deaths, all caused by the greed of men who did not scruple to wring their wealth out of the life blood of their workers. This was the first result of the system of free competition, of supply and demand, of *laissez-faire*, of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market. No wonder that even when somewhat reformed, it aroused the indignation of men like Mr. Ruskin, whose denunciations of it have served in no slight degree to bring it to the bar of public opinion, and to swell the chorus of social condemnation. But, thanks to Lord Shaftesbury and other good men, many of these abuses are now swept away and others have been greatly modified. And, in the judgment of many wise and benevolent men, the right course for the English nation is to persevere on these lines of improvement, in the hope that if equal progress be made in years to come as in the past, the condition of the working class will become sufficiently civilized and comfortable.

But in this view socialists will not concur. They maintain that under any system of capitalism in the hands of individuals, the object of the employer will be to give as little as possible of the profits of their labor to his workmen, and keep as much as possible to himself. The value of any product, socialists say, is determined by the amount and quality of the labor bestowed on it. To whom does this value rightfully belong but to the worker? Unless the worker gets the full value of his work, he is robbed. No amendment of the present system will ever give the workman all that he is entitled to. Such a result will never take place till the whole instruments of production are public property, and labor is so organized that, after necessary deductions, each laborer shall receive the share which corresponds to the amount and quality of his labor.

The threshing out of the principle here assumed, that the value of products is measured by the labor bestowed on them, has not proved very favorable to socialism. It is denied that labor is the only element that goes to constitute value. Dr. Flint, in his recent elaborate book on socialism, has shown well that mere labor creates nothing, any more than the moving of our hands and feet in space would create anything. Labor must receive from nature the materials on which it works; it must be aided by the intelligence that plans and directs it, and by the machinery, often complicated and elaborate, that has been designed

for its purposes ; and it must be turned to account by the discovery of customers who desire to purchase its products. It is one thing to maintain that labor is an essential element of value, and also that in the distribution of profits labor has not hitherto received its due share ; but it is another thing to represent it as the one element of value, and to make this the standard by which the just demands of the workmen are to be tried. Even Dr. Schäffle, in spite of his strong leaning to socialism, strongly contends that, in addition to the *labor* value of products, we must take into account what he calls their *use* value, the value that arises from the amount of demand there is for them. I may write an elaborate book that costs me a world of labor, but, useful though it may be, the demand for it may be almost *nil*. Under a socialistic scheme of regarding labor, how should the value of my book be determined ? If by the amount of my labor, it will stand high ; if by the sale of the book, extremely low. What Dr. Schäffle maintains is that socialism has not grappled with this question, which, under any practical scheme, would be an extremely important one. We are not, therefore, entitled to assume, as so many socialists do, especially of the working class, that labor is what constitutes the sole or nearly sole value of products, or to maintain that the workman is robbed aye and until he obtain the full value of the product which his hands have fashioned.

Land holds a foremost place among the means of production that must become public property under a valid socialistic economy. Naturally, the question arises, How is the land to be acquired by the nation ? Happily the idea of seizing it without compensation has no advocates among reasonable men. There are those who mutter that as the land was originally the property of the nation, but has unrighteously come to private owners, who enjoy its fruits at the expense of the laborer, who, as producer, ought to have the greater part of them, all landlords should be treated as robbers and compelled to disgorge their unrighteous mammon. But any such proposal would give too great a shock to the conscience of the nation to be seriously entertained. The nation recognizes the right of private property under arrangements that have come down from time immemorial, even supposing that centuries ago the first private proprietors acquired the property unjustly. And some of the most intelligent advocates of socialism hold that a landlord or a capitalist who should

be converted to socialism would be under no obligation, moral or legal, to throw up his property, so long as the present system prevailed.

Compensation, therefore, in some form, would be due to the landlord if his land were transferred to the state. But any such arrangement would be a poor one for the people, seeing that even under the present system the profits derived from land are so small, and it is more than doubtful whether they would be better under public management. As we say, a money compensation in these circumstances would make the arrangement as broad as it is long—perhaps broader. But, under a thorough system of socialism money would be abolished. There could therefore be no compensation in money. The compensation, according to Dr. Schäffle, both for land, capital and other instruments of production, would be in the form of perishable goods—in what is called labor-money, that is to say, in the form of orders on the department of distribution for such goods as they distributed, consisting of the common necessities and a few of the luxuries of life. But the compensation would not yield a permanent income, nor would it allow the recipients to carry on any productive work that would make them independent. As Dr. Schäffle remarks, even the fortune of a Rothschild could not long resist the process of dissipation that would soon set in!

Another proposed way of dealing with landed property is to increase taxation on it to such an extent that ultimately its whole value should be absorbed in the taxes, and landlords would no longer care to keep what brought them nothing. This is the course advocated by Mr. Henry George, and by Morris and Bax in their work on *Socialism* (1893), as it is also by the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, editor of the *Church* [of England] *Reformer*. It is indeed strange that so mean a proposal should find respectable advocates. But it is hardly less strange that it should be entertained as a practicable scheme. How should such a taxation obtain the sanction of Parliament? Unless, indeed, we should come to have a Parliament of red-hot socialists, the thing is out of the question; and that is a prospect that does not seem very near! Even the 25 per cent. tax proposed by the Financial Reform Association may be regarded as quite Utopian.

That all property acquired by and for the nation must be reasonably compensated for is, therefore, coming to be admitted

generally in England, although voices against compensation may be heard occasionally. Compensation would take the sting out of the older socialism, and place the whole question on a footing on which it might be calmly discussed by honest and reasonable men.

Other important concessions, as we must call them, have also been made. For instance, the introduction of socialism is no longer advocated in the form of a revolutionary mechanical measure, to supersede the present system as suddenly and as completely as the railways superseded the stage coach, or as the electric light takes the place of gas. It is admitted that any change must be a gradual one, and that the new system, instead of a mechanical creation, must be a vital growth. The law of evolution must apply to it. All permanent institutions, it is seen, follow this law, and anything affecting society must obey it. And then the question arises, How long time may the process demand? Various answers have been given, ranging between fifty and five hundred years: for, as evolution generally works slowly, it is seen that this process must be slow. By this concession, another ground of alarm has been removed. People are seldom alarmed at the prospect of a change which is to work slowly and gradually, like the subsidence of a beach losing a foot or two in a hundred years. It was the idea that socialism was to be brought in like the French Revolution that terrified people, the idea of "after me the deluge;" the thought of Europe converted into an innumerable multitude of volcanoes, causing confusion and desolation on every side.

And then, too, we find that the more reasonable socialists are more concerned to sow the seed of their principles and leaven society with their spirit, than to attempt the practical execution of their projects. This is clearly seen in Mr. Sidney Webb's *Socialism in England* (Second Edition, 1893), one of the most reasonable expositions of the system which have lately appeared. In common with most socialists, he sees a great tendency to the adoption of socialist views and operations in the public policy of the nation. That is to say, we are continually increasing the number of institutions managed by the nation for the nation. The army, the navy, are old socialist institutions; but in recent times the carriage of letters, books, and parcels, the telegraph system, public education, life insurance (through the post office),



granting annuities, remitting money, etc., etc., are socialist operations. Municipal socialism is even more active than national. All that concerns the heating, lighting, cleansing and repairing of the streets; in many cases gas-works, water-works, tramways, galleries, gardens and baths have become public concerns. And, outside the nation and the municipality, individual ownership is in the course of being exchanged for joint-stock companies, hundreds and thousands of proprietors taking the place of one. The very men that denounce socialism, as Mr. Sidney Webb puts it, are unconsciously practising it. "The individualist town councillor will walk along the municipal pavement, lit by municipal gas, and cleaned by municipal broom with municipal water, and seeing by the municipal clock in the municipal market that he is too early to meet his children coming from the municipal school, hard by the county lunatic asylum and municipal hospital, will use the national telegraph system and tell them not to walk through the municipal park, but to come by the municipal tramway, to meet him in the municipal reading-room, by the municipal art gallery, museum, and library, where he intends to consult some of the national publications in order to prepare his next speech in the municipal town hall, in favor of the nationalization of the canals and the increase of the government control over the railway system." And yet he will denounce socialism as a dream!

Socialists believe that in these and in other ways, the public mind is becoming familiarized with the great idea—collectivism *versus* individualism. As the process goes on, they think that it will become ripe for the last and crowning step—the conversion of the whole instruments of production into the property of the State. By the time that the public mind is thus prepared, another operation, also favorable to socialism, will have been completed—the absorption of all the smaller industries, and the extinction of the class of individuals working at their own hand, for their own benefit. When this comes to pass socialists think we may slide into socialism as easily as the railway train, at the end of its journey, slides into the rail that brings it to the platform.

So long as socialists work mainly on these two lines—exposing the evils of the present system, and indicating the reality and the benefit of socialist principles, so far as they are currently in

operation among us—it is possible that it will become more popular ; it may gather new recruits, and it may avoid the rough handling that the older and bolder socialism encountered. But it seems to us a great mistake to suppose that the forms of national or municipal socialism now in operation will really prepare the way for the final gulp. Before the whole instruments of production are nationalized many important and difficult questions have to be settled. In the first place, how are we to find a substitute for the motives that under the present system impel men to diligence, activity, and inventiveness ? In other words, how is a man to be induced to work as hard for the welfare of the community as he does for himself and his family ? It is sometimes said in reply to this, that selfishness and other evil propensities will pass away when the present temptations to the exercise of them are removed ; men will become generous and amiable when nothing is to be gained by greed and passion. It were amusing, if it were not too serious for amusement, to mark the simplicity of mind with which this transformation of human nature is expected from a change of circumstances ! As if in all circumstances and under all systems, monarchy, republicanism, democracy, oligarchy, and amid all conditions of life, riches or poverty, ease or struggle, success or failure, the great features and failings of human nature had not always been, and would not always be, the same ! Nothing in all the speculations, whether of the socialists or the philosophers of the present day, is so surprising as the facility with which they think they can generate an “altruism” sufficient for their purposes ! In this connection, the contention of Mr. Benjamin Kidd, in his *Social Evolution*, demands our serious consideration. He maintains that all the altruism that has hitherto been at work among men has been generated by religion, and religion alone. We may be excused for refusing to believe in an altruism that comes from a mere belief in the greatest good of the greatest number. The demon of selfishness is not so easy to exorcise. “Leviathan is not so tamed.” True, there is no necessary antagonism between socialism and religion. But more is needed than the absence of antagonism. If the true altruistic spirit is necessary for the success of socialism, it must come from the fountain of religion, and socialism must enter into close alliance with religion. “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ?”

Another great question needing to be settled is the scale on which labor is to be rewarded. Our present system settles that question by a natural process. But before a vast scheme of unified labor could be worked, definite rules must be agreed to regarding it. What difference is to be made in the same occupation between the work of the active, steady worker, and that of the slow, idle, good-for-nothing one? And how is the value of work in different occupations to be settled? And what about mental work, and other work that is not strictly productive? And what if the work of some particular individual, say an author, is in infinite demand, and that of another hardly in demand at all? Then again, it is a principle of socialism that the State is bound to provide work for all. But what if the State cannot give a man the work he likes? What if that department be already full? He must just take such work as the State, or rather the officials that manage the department, can give him. All will be under State officials. Will this conduce to liberty? If I can only get work that I don't like from an official that does not like me, shall I be much better than now? We know how much men will sacrifice for liberty; and both our working men and our thinking men will pause before committing themselves to a system that may practically land the worker in slavery.

Then the enormous army of State officials that would be called into being is another serious consideration. The national book-keeping which (if money were abolished) would have to embrace a record of every transaction of buying and selling in every man's life, is too gigantic to think of. And how would international commerce be arranged? What kinds of goods, scheduled as productive, would be forbidden, and what, being non-productive, would be allowed? Might one possess a carriage but not a wheelbarrow? an organ, but not a sewing-machine?

Mr. Webb did not meddle with those questions when he was in America, and they are not discussed in his published book. It is wise policy to keep them in the background, and to bring forward the non-contentious points of socialism; but it is a mistake to suppose that because the public readily accept what is non-contentious, we are nearer a final solution of the real question.

We have considered the prospects of socialism in England as the subject is presented to us by the more educated and cultured champions of the cause; it may be well, before concluding,

to say a word on the attitude and expectations of the working classes.

It is quite natural for them to feel keenly on the subject. It is natural to believe that their labor is too hard and their remuneration too small, and to feel that there is something far wrong when so many idle men live in ease and luxury, and so many hard toiling men have hardly the means of bare subsistence. It is natural to chafe at a foreign sovereign drawing £10,000 a year, or an ex-Speaker £4,000 a year from what they consider the profits of their toil. No class can feel the evils of the present system more than they do. And unless they have something of the wisdom that would "rather bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of," it is natural for them to have strong leanings to socialism. But when the shrewdest and steadiest of them try to see through the social system, and to consider how society would get along under it, it is no wonder they find themselves in a maze. It is the labor question, as it is called, that more immediately interests the working class, and though that question is very closely related to socialism, yet several of its issues do not depend on it. The length of the labor day, the living wage, the protection of the workman, education, old-age pensions, comfortable houses, allotments, crofts and the like, are all apart from the leading positions of socialism, and it is with these questions mainly that the working class are at present concerned. True, the I. L. P. (Independent Labor Party) has a socialistic basis, believing that socialism would be the complete solution of all that it aims at. But meanwhile its chief energies are directed to what more specifically belongs to the Labor question.

But certainly the recent election to Parliament has done little to comfort either the socialists or the I. L. P. Keir Hardie is out and his protégés are not in. The verdict of the country has been given against too many organic changes, and in favor of working out for the present admitted principles that tend to the general good.

And thus the answer we give to the question, Is socialism advancing in England? is substantially this: Not in its radical principles; not in its demand for organic change; not in its claim to nationalize the whole instruments of production. As a new system, it may be picking up adherents here and there, in-

telligent and patriotic men of sanguine temperament, like the members of the Fabian Society, who hope that the difficulties in the way of its practical working may one day be overcome, though they may not see how. But as a real force in the country, gathering power as it goes, and only needing time to bear it to victory, we maintain that it is not advancing. In many ways, however, it is doing useful work ; it is calling attention to the condition of the worker and the obligation of society to give him a more comfortable life ; it is constraining the Christian churches to address themselves more to the improvement of the condition of the people ; it is compelling the legislature to give its deserved prominence to this subject ; and it is drawing out many men and women to use their influence and their lives for the welfare of those who spend their lives in daily toil. Dr. Flint has pointed out its faults : so far as it allies itself to atheism and materialism ; so far as it assumes that man's chief end is a happy life on earth ; so far as it attaches more importance to the condition of men than to their character ; and so far as it does injustice to the rights of individuals. With these faults amended, so far as they exist, it may do still greater service ; and should it find its goal inaccessible, it may turn out that it has done better for humanity than if it had been crowned with victory.

W. GARDEN BLAICKIE.